Short Copy: Understanding Its Purpose Can Increase Sales

By Karon Thackston

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I believe it was Mark Twain that once said, "If I would have had time, I would have written a shorter letter." His point being... it takes much more thought and time to write a short, concise piece than a long one. It's true, too!

Think about it. How hard is it to get your point across in a very limited amount of time or space? Ever tried to write copy for a postcard mailing? How about a 30-second radio commercial? How do you tell customers everything you want them to know in just a few words? Truth is... you don't.

Short copy has some special considerations. The first (and most important) is that it isn't meant to make the sale. Then why do you write it? *To spark interest!*

Short copy plays an important role in the advertising process. It can be used as a lead generation tool, an announcement, a teaser to build interest, and in lots of other ways. Extremely short copy is simply meant to lead to other means of closing a sale.

Postcard mailers might instruct the reader to send for an information package. Pay-per-click search engine listings will guide the reader to a Web site just full of copy. Ezine ads do the same thing. Small display ads in newspapers or in-store signage may encourage the reader to get more details. You get the point.

Short copy needs to be extremely targeted. For example, if you're running a small display ad in a magazine you'll want to take into consideration "why" the readers bought that magazine. Then create your headline and copy to speak to their special interests.

If the magazine is devoted to Web site development, address that interest in your ad. Consider what will grab your customer's attention and make him/her curious. The "call-to-action" for short ads is always aimed at getting more information... not necessarily at making the sale.

Many times, short copy will pull a better response if a limited-time offer is made. "Zero percent interest until January 30th" or "Order before February 1st and get FREE shipping."

WARNING: Be very, VERY sure that your support copy is ready to go when you run short ads. For instance, I once had a client approach me about writing copy for a postcard campaign he wanted to

do. As we went through the process of his customers' most desired behavior, I discovered that he wanted readers to visit his Web site to get the additional information they needed in order to purchase. However, his Web site was hardly set up to sell anything to anybody.

While the postcard was fully capable of generating leads for the client, the support information he had prepared was in desperate shape! He would have seen little return on his investment - not because the postcard didn't do its job - but because the "landing page" of his site was simply awful.

Whether you're asking readers of short copy to call, click, or come by, be sure your support staff or information is ready, willing, and able to handle the job.

Lastly, when you write extremely short copy, remember to stay focused. As I've said, there is not enough room to sell the customers within your copy, but there IS enough room to pique their interest. Use the limited space you have to punch up the biggest benefits or end results your customers are looking for, and you'll see bigger returns on your investment.

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